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Organizing Love – Thoughts on the Transformative and Activist Potential of Feminine Writing

Sheena J Vachhani, University of Bristol

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Abstract

This paper engages with what it means to write love and poses the question: what does love do for feminine writing? I move beyond the concept of love as an ideology or condition of work (such as ‘for the love of the job’) and draw on a feminine poetics of organisation that highlights its disruptive potential. Love, in this sense, breaks the rationality and order of the ‘masterful’ text and alters gendered academic writing. The power of writing with love and effecting change in organisations is developed through a discussion of three feminist writers. The paper explores three significant texts: Kristeva’s *Tales of Love*; Irigaray’s *The Way of Love*; and hooks’ *All About Love* in order to examine the problematic representation of love and to advocate a turn to an ethics of love as a basis for self-other relations that points us to defiant, activist and transformative forms of feminine writing. These writers bring to bear practical politics and possibilities through political interruption – namely through three modes: reconstruction, reclamation and activation and I discuss the implications of these modes for work and organisation, notably that writing and thinking the wisdom of love offers insight into how we creatively imagine socially just organisations of the future.

Key Words: activism, ethics, hooks, Irigaray, language, Kristeva, love, organization, poetics.

Introduction

‘As a society we are embarrassed by love. We treat it as if it were an obscenity. We reluctantly admit to it. Even saying the word makes us stumble and blush...Love is the most important thing in our lives, a passion for which we would fight or die, and yet we’re reluctant to linger over its names.

Without a supple vocabulary, we can't even talk or think about it directly' (Diane Ackerman, quoted in hooks, 2000:1).

Studies of gender, work and organisation have long since focused attention on the ways in which organisational relationships are charged with passion and emotion and the politics that arise from these relationships (Bell and Sinclair, 2014; Dey and Steyaert, 2007; Fineman, 2003; Pullen, 2006). Alongside these concerns, organisations are often considered to devalue forms of culture associated with the 'feminine' (Borgerson and Rehn, 2004; Hopfl, 2011; Phillips et al, 2013) and as Hopfl (2011:33) astutely notes, 'Just as there is no place for women in writing, so there is no place in the organization...Feminine attributes which are required in the service of the organization are constructed within the phallogocentric discourse in order to serve its ends'. Gender theorists have opened up numerous avenues that challenge the places and spaces designated to the feminine and represent the unrepresentable, intangible aspects of organisational life as a means to resist, challenge or confuse rationalised, gender neutral tendencies in academic writing and practice (Grey and Sinclair; Phillips et al, 2013; Rhodes, 2001). In this sense, the project of feminine writing is a means of representing the unrepresentable as a way of challenging devalued notions of the 'feminine' (however conceived) in organisations.

This paper contends that writing about love contains a disruptive quality for our understanding of organisations – where love is at once elucidating and illuminating of organisational relationships but also unravelling and unsettling. I lay some of the foundations for exploring the challenges and productive possibilities that discourses of love, understood through a feminine poetics of organisation, pose to organising and, as Toye (2010:41) also exposes, its curious resistance to representation and communicability. Thus, the contribution of this article is to centralise love as a fundamental concept in gender, work and organisation and address how the connections between love and writing are a means of political activism, or indeed political interruption, and the

implications this has for organisations and organisation theory. Writing love offers insight into how we understand gendered self-other relations and how we creatively imagine socially just organisations in the future. It is not my contention here to devise or practice a new or specific form of feminine writing but to explore love's absent presence in current discussions of gendered organisation and how focusing our attention on love brings forth possibilities for writing differently and effecting change, most notably ethical and political change. I raise the question: what does love do for thinking and writing the feminine in organisation? In order to address this question I draw on writers who effect change through different and contrasting approaches to feminine writing and love.

Each text represents different writing projects and connects to the theme of love in distinct ways. Firstly, I explore the poststructuralist French feminist tradition, through Kristeva's concern with representing love and literary language and Irigaray's approach to *écriture féminine*, or bodily writing of 'two lips' and the 'caress' (Irigaray, 1985; 1993). Both Irigaray and Kristeva place attention on love and its relation to the gendered symbolic order. In contrast to these two approaches, I draw on hooks' work on love as a way of realising a political activism, one centred around change and social justice that attends to the social meanings of love and how it connects to writing at the intersections of gender, class and race (Nkomo, 1992). Thus, I focus on three key texts concerned with conceptualising and writing love that accomplish these aims: Kristeva's (1987) *Tales of Love*; Irigaray's (2002) *The Way of Love*; and hooks' (2000) *All About Love*. In the spirit of this article, and more broadly the special issue, feeling and thinking with these authors is an affective experience, a necessary experience that changes thinking and writing out of a feminine space and allows us insight into the potential for transformation and change. Through the analysis of these authors I draw together the ethical and political challenges as well as possibilities for a feminine writing of love in organisation that are transformative and have the potential for addressing political struggles.

The paper unfolds as follows: firstly, I examine the problems and tensions of representing love that expose a number of challenges for feminine writing. Secondly, I turn to each of the three authors and critical texts on love which illuminate different aspects of transformation. Thirdly, these writers bring to bear practical politics and possibilities through political interruption – namely through three modes: *reconstruction, reclamation and activation*. I discuss the implications of these modes for work and organisation, how such a politics may be realised and its effects. Moreover, feminine writing has been viewed as a way of escaping politics but, as I argue here, is central to ethical approaches of effecting politics. Therefore, as I have intimated, the key theme of the paper centres around the concept of love as a way of realising an activist form of feminine writing that is mobilising of change. I now turn to conceptualising love and then provide an exegesis of each text which examines the stylistic and conceptual challenges these writers pose for a feminine poetics of organisation.

Representing Love – Writing, Oppression and the Feminine Poetics of Organisation

We have begun to see more interest in affective connections, experiences and relations in studies of work and organization (see, for example, Beyes and Steyaert, 2013; Dey and Steyaert, 2007; Gherardi, 1994; Iedema et al, 2006; Pullen and Rhodes, 2013), however, there is still limited development of how these concerns change how we write gendered organisational experiences (some notable exceptions are Borgerson and Rehn, 2004; Grey and Sinclair, 2006; Rhodes, 2001; Phillips et al, 2013; and Pullen and Rhodes, 2008) and how they enable us to creatively envision the future of organisations. In this section I explore how love has been conceptualised and the challenges and tensions this poses for representing love and contributing to our understanding of gender issues in organisations.

Love has been treated as an ideology, one that feminists have critiqued on the basis of love as an opiate; the basis for problematic gendered relationships of power (Benjamin, 1988; Firestone, 1970; Toye, 2010); or an impossible object (Salecl, 1998). In studies of work and organization, the 'conditions' of love have been used to explain asymmetrical power relations and highlight women's subordination, unequal pay and labour. Above all, love is not taken seriously or is reformulated as the conditions for employment or vocational joy (for example, 'for the love of the job') where love's object has already been created. In organisations we see a deeper resistance to love as intersubjective and ambiguous. Being anti-love is translated as a sign of being realistic or strong. Indeed, discourses of love and work are mobilised into narratives of control, of being yourself and loving your work as a mark of authenticity (Fleming and Sturdy, 2011). Moreover, love is enrolled into discourses of identity where labour is morphed into a space of leisure and confined to the individual as a way of making work meaningful. The aphorism 'do what you love' is a symbol of the privileged and elite; the act of love becomes a choice where success, profit and love are unproblematically united and where labour serves the self and consequently the organisation. Regardless of the cautionary approach to love that research in organisation has taken, what is omitted from these discourses is how love and the conflation of the ideals of profit and passionate enjoyment mask darker ethical issues and irresolvable questions of power and authority. Love, in this sense, is a by word for positivity, satisfaction and the rewards they bring. From a psychoanalytic perspective, intersubjective relations of love and desire are intimately tied to non-satisfaction; of desiring things because they are unavailable (Salecl, 1998). As Lacan writes, 'I love you, but, because inexplicably I love in you something more than you – the *object petit a* – I mutilate you' (Lacan, 1977:263). In this vein, to keep desire alive one must prevent its fulfilment, thus it is an impossible object. As Salecl (1998:3) explains, '...the object can simultaneously be perceived as something one admires and is seduced by, as well as something one hates and is disgusted by. Paradoxically, the subject often destroys what he or she most loves'. This love is painful and simultaneously contains hate and disgust.

As I have intimated, love often eludes interpretation by language, it evades logic or discursive capture (Brennan, 2004; Deleuze, 1988; Roman, 1994; Sedgwick, 2003; Seigworth and Gregg, 2010). Love itself is destabilising and unsettling and evokes intimacies and desires (Bell and Sinclair, 2014). It is mysterious (Sontag, 2012). As hooks reminds us in *All About Love* (2000), the confusion of what we mean by this word is the source of our difficulty in loving. She writes, 'if our society had a commonly held understanding of the meaning of love, the act of loving would not be so mystifying' (ibid.:3) The concept of love is both troubling and troublesome. Bell and Sinclair (2014) discuss the tensions of love and pleasure in academic life and highlight the need to explore 'carnal' knowledge by recognising the knowledge the body generates. They advocate for love as the wisdom of love in writing, of taking pleasure in experimenting with powerful modes of writing that reconnect women with their sexuality. Through Cixous, such writing has emancipatory benefits for society and for transforming social and cultural structures. Bell and Sinclair advocate a reclaiming of eros and desire in the academy. In comparison, Bologh (1990:165) discusses Weber's notion of brotherly love which serves to remove any association with eros or desire and where love is, in some sense, already written into the masculine trajectory of rationality and order. Bologh demonstrates how Weber aligns inner states of contemplation with erotic or mystical love (associated with women and mystics) and those committed to the outer life of practical action and accomplishment (associated with men), thus pitting 'action and success in the world against love and withdrawal from the world'. In Bologh's analysis brotherly love is problematically based on an ethic of impersonal relations of love which, for her, is a contradiction and problematizes how existing self-other relations are lacking in intimacy. Love's political power for transforming organisations is diminished when it is seen as a private and apolitical encounter. Far from being an escape from politics, love is a way of effecting them. The force of love compels us to act and focus our attention on the relationship with the other.

Love has been a central theme in feminine poetics especially in the writing of gender, class and racial oppression, where writing is itself already a form of action (*cf.* Showalter, 1986; Moi, 2002) and manifests forms of bodily writing that explore embodied experiences such as *parler-femme* (to speak as woman) or *écriture féminine* (Burke, 1980, Irigaray, 1985; Sellers, 1991). This approach becomes valuable for understanding organisations as it creates a capacity to make transparent the effects and production of meaning and regulation of the ‘other’ (Hopfl, 2011). It enables a form of poesis that offers possibilities of actively imagining and creating organisations of the future (Rhodes, 2009; Threadgold, 1997)¹. Feminine poetics of organisation are often contrasted with the academic demand for theory and ‘authorisation’ (Hopfl, 1999, 2000) which ‘can only be heard as a threat to the feminist need for authenticity, and the visitor looking for a formula that he or she can take away without personal encounter’ (Showalter, 1986:127). Lorde’s (1984/2007:37) *Sister Outsider* elaborates on the political and necessary potential of poetry as ‘the skeleton architecture of our lives’ and a ‘revelatory distillation of experience’ that ‘forms the quality of the light within which we predicate our hopes and dreams toward survival and change’ and is, therefore, a vital necessity for women’s existence.

Above all perhaps ‘there is something about the phenomena of love as experienced by embodied subjects that seems to bring language itself into crisis’ (Toye, 2010:43). Another important point Toye (2010) makes and one central to my argument here is that writing love has been designated a gendered and, indeed, feminine subject where discourses of love are both associated with women but also used against them (Fetterley, 1978; Russ, 1983). This discussion raises a number of problems and tensions for representing what we mean by love, by the ineffable and unrepresentable. Love is an affective, bodily encounter with the other, one that invokes affective intensities (Massumi, 1995, 2002; see also Badiou, 2012) of joy, pain, longing or vitality (Scarry, 1985) and these are experienced in social interaction, in moments of affecting and being affected (Massumi, 1995). Broadly, love is ever present, at least under the surface, in discussions of passions,

intimacies and desires (Berlant, 2012; Brewis and Linstead, 2000; Fineman, 2003) and tensions arise from its ambiguity in organisational life. I now turn to three writers, each of whom exemplify different approaches to love and highlight conceptual challenges between love and writing as a means of political interruption or activism.

Kristeva - Tales of Love and Radical Doubt

‘Love at first sight, wild love, immeasurable love, fiery love...Trying to talk about it seems to me different from living it, but no less troublesome and delightfully intoxicating. Does this sound ridiculous? It is mad. No doubt the risk of a discourse of love, of a lover’s discourse, comes mainly from uncertainty as to its object. Indeed, what are we talking about?’

(Kristeva, 1987:2).

Kristeva’s psychoanalytical analysis is primarily concerned with the abject (*cf.* Tyler, 2011; Phillips and Rippin, 2010) and the difficulty of talking and writing about love: ‘The language of love is impossible, inadequate, immediately allusive when one would like it to be more straightforward; it is a flight of metaphors – it is literature. As it is singular, I accept it only in the first person’ (Kristeva, 1987:1). Hopfl’s influential work along with Tyler (2011), Phillips and Rippin (2010) and Vachhani (2014) on the abject and organisation, highlight a major contribution of Kristeva’s work: how meaning collapses but cannot be radically excluded and is thus tolerated, and where self-other loses distinction yet we continually seek to re-establish unity. The importance of Kristeva’s work for my purpose here is that feminine writing is predicated upon a ‘desire to confront the problem of capture within the patriarchal text’ yet ‘to attempt to use language against itself is to create an untenable position’ (Hopfl, 2011:33).

Tales of Love explores a psychoanalytic philosophy of love and can be understood through: ‘an infinite quest for rebirths through the experience of love, which is begun again only to be displaced,

renewed, and, if not abreacted, at least collected and set up at the heart of the analysand's ulterior life as an auspicious condition for his perpetual renewal, his non-death?' (ibid:1). Kristeva is concerned with the elusive displacement of love as one tries to apprehend it. In this sense the book, which has modest aims of practical transformation, concerns the gendered symbolic order and the ambivalence of love; the precautions, aspirations and 'violence of our passions about the other' or 'vulnerability hidden under a mask of vigilance' (Kristeva, 1987:1).

One of the most important aspects of Kristeva's analysis is the relationship between literary language and love (Kristeva, 1980, 1984; Lechte, 1990). Love contains a metaphysical, or least linguistic, profundity for Kristeva (1987:2-3) that raises the question: when we speak about love, do we speak of the same thing? Kristeva recounts a discussion with a young woman: 'And of what thing? When we said we were in love, did we reveal to our lovers the true purport of our passions? We weren't sure; for when they in turn declared themselves in love with us we were never sure what that meant exactly, to them'. This marks a profound slippage in the ability to enunciate love:

'Beyond the revelation – yet another one – of the abyss separating the sexes, such questioning hints that love would, in any case, be solitary because incommunicable. As if, at the very moment when the individual discovered himself to be intensely true, powerfully subjective, but violently ethical because he would be generously ready to do anything for the other, he also discovered the confines of his condition and the powerlessness of his language' (ibid:3).

As Hopfl (2011:29) writes, Kristeva's 'writing is seminal to the extent that it seeks the transgression of phallogocentric order. The most powerful aspect of her writing is the sense of resistance that powers the ideas, obscures the writing, and seeks to evade capture in the phallogocentric project of language. Understood in this way, her writing is defensive in dealing with things which are forbidden

in well regulated writing, so that her meaning obscures itself in order to protect itself from definition'. This is perhaps the most intriguing difference in the texts I explore in this article: that her writing of love is based on a theoretically dense and almost impenetrably scientific defence (cf. Hopfl, 1999, 2000). Like Irigaray there are double meanings, idiosyncrasies of style (Burke, 1980), even free associations, that oscillate and move between mastery and struggle (Hopfl, 2003, 2011). As Kristeva writes, 'Words that are always too distant, too abstract for this underground swarming of seconds, folding in unimaginable spaces. Writing them down is an ordeal of discourse, like love. What is loving, for a woman, the same thing as writing. Laugh. Impossible. Flash on the unnameable, weavings of abstractions to be torn. Let a body venture at last out of its shelter, take a chance with meaning under a veil of words. WORD FLESH. From one to the other, eternally, broken up visions, metaphors of the invisible' (Kristeva, 1987:235).

Kristeva's writing of love attempts to evade capture but also senses the uneasiness with which meaning is established, especially of the unnameable. The relevance of this work for studying organisations concerns how love enables a feminine writing that disrupts the rational, the pre-ordered structures of language and names and constructs authority. In *Stabat Mater*, Kristeva literally breaks the body of the text to develop the text from two positions: the Body and the Law (Hopfl, 2000, 2004). One could argue that whilst the page is split in two and the text written from different positions to suggest an oscillation between the two modes, each side is protected from the other. From this position, love is written as contradiction and misunderstanding. As she writes, 'If I emphasize love as a crucible of contradictions and misunderstandings – at the same time infinity of meaning and occultation of meaning – it is because, as such, it prevents me from being smothered to death beneath the hotchpotch of subterfuges and compromises of group or couple neuroses' (Kristeva, 1987:2). In addition, 'to speak of love may be, perhaps, a simple condensation of speech that merely arouses, in the one spoken to, metaphorical capabilities – a whole imaginary,

uncontrollable, undecidable flood, of which the loved one alone unknowingly possesses the key...what does he understand me to be saying? What do I understand him to be saying?' (ibid:3).

This places meaning in radical doubt, where meaning collapses which Kristeva develops through the abject. Language itself is brought into crisis where the 'ordeal of love puts the univocity of language and its referential and communicative power to the test' (Kristeva, 1987: 2; Toye, 2010). What this means for the arguments presented here, as Hopfl (2011:33-34) also astutely points out, is the paradox of capture: 'Women's writing seems to be almost an impossibility and fails when subject to scrutiny and the process of authorization. The relationship between writing and identity, writing and authority, writing and the body, makes the subject of women's writing an interesting one to consider in relation to women's work roles, identity and problems of authority and permission'. Kristeva's concern with holding a position within the phallogocentric text highlights the untenable position many women face in organisations when they deviate from roles always already assigned to them (I develop this point later in the article).

Irigaray - The Way of Love and Bodily Writing

'The same....Same....Always the same'. (Irigaray, 1985:205)

In contrast with Kristeva, Irigaray critiques the Lacanian view of feminine sexuality more vehemently by writing *against* the phallogocentric order. Irigaray's seminal article 'When Our Lips Speak Together' published in the journal *Signs* (1980) and reproduced in *This Sex Which is Not One* (1985) marks the beginning of a new phase in Irigaray's work, one that transitions through patriarchal discourses and, as Burke (1980:67) notes, explores an 'ideological space' for feminine writing, more specifically *parler femme* or 'to speak female'. This form of embodied writing, or writing through the body, that aims to transform and to effect gendered difference also demonstrates how love is central to Irigaray's ethics of sexual difference. The theoretical aspects of Irigaray's ethics have

found voice in studies of gender and work, for example Dale (2001), Oseen (1997, 2005), Fotaki (2011), Fotaki et al (2014), Metcalfe (2003), and Vachhani (2012), however this has not yet translated into what is made possible by writing the body, for understanding self-other relations or social change in organisations. What we learn from Irigaray, and Hopfl's foundational work in the field, are the ways in which mastery and rationality in writing have disciplining effects and that feminine writing, understood through the writers explored here, inhabit a political position, one that insinuates resistance (Hopfl, 2011) and which identifies organisations as sites that are not able to bear the weight of the feminine. As Hopfl (2011:28) notes, Irigaray 'is identifying the problem of what it is to be a woman within the phallogocentric discourse: what it is to be constructed in a way which conforms to patriarchal notions of order and authority, and what it is to be regulated by representations which are at variance with embodied experience'.

Whilst there have been criticisms of Irigaray's approach as a biologically essentialist strategy, many have argued that Irigaray's focus on love between women is a way of realising a feminine language that breaks patriarchal language structures through the insistence on two sexually specific subjects rather than the mediation of one through the other (what she refers to as 'the other of the same', that is the self-same relations of phallogocentrism). As Irigaray writes,

'If we keep speaking sameness, if we speak to each other as men have been doing for centuries, as we have been taught to speak, we'll miss each other, fail ourselves.

Again...Words will pass through our bodies, above our heads. They'll vanish and we'll be lost.

Far off, up high. Absent from ourselves: we'll be spoken machines, speaking machines.

Enveloped in proper skins, but our own. Withdrawn into proper names, violated by them.

Not yours, not mine. We don't have any. We change names as men exchange us, exchanged by them, to be so changeable' (Irigaray, 1985:205).

As Toye (2010:47) notes, 'Irigaray constantly emphasizes the space of mediation between two subjects, what figures are used in our culture to convey this space, and how, by offering alternative figures to occupy this space, might a revolution in thought and ethics occur'. Irigaray offers a number of possible modes for conveying this embodied space of love especially in her symbolism and metonymic writings in the 'fecundity of the caress' (Irigaray, 1993) and 'when our two lips speak together' (Irigaray, 1985). The morphological figure of 'two lips' touching – mouth and labia (Whitford, 1991) serve as alternatives not substitutes to the phallus and constitute 'the mediating space between subjects that allows the subjects to come into contact with one another but without being reduced one to the other. These figures indicate both a closeness and distance and suggest an embodied as well as a transcended being' (Toye, 2010:47).

In *I Love to You* (1996) and *The Way of Love* (2002) the concepts of proximity and amorous exchange are central. As Whitford (1991:165) writes, 'the amorous exchange is not the exchange of commodities but a mode of ethical being. The horizon opened up by the woman's accession to her own space-time is that of fertility and creation...In order to become a woman, it seems, it is first necessary to rethink all the categories which structure our thought and experience. It is not just a question of inventing some new terms, but of a total symbolic redistribution'. This amorous exchange is not utopian in the sense that it does not mean a pre-established harmony or end of conflict between the sexes. In *I Love to You* Irigaray elaborates on the proximity-distance relation which does not constitute consuming or reducing the Other to the One. Saying 'I love you' risks reducing the other to an object of love (Irigaray, 1996:109), 'I love to you means I maintain a relation of indirection to you'. Thus, 'Love is the vehicle...which permits the passage between, the passage to and fro between sensible and intelligible, mortal and immortal, above and below, immanent and transcendent. Instead of an abyss, or an enclosure which defines an inside and an outside, there should be a threshold, and the possibility of permanent passage in and out' (Whitford, 1991:164).

What we learn from Irigaray's writing of love for work and organisation is that sexual difference must be understood as the differences between sexually specific subjects rather than as a variation of the self-same which relies on a system of meaning based on masculine identity as sameness (Irigaray, 1993; Fotaki et al, 2014; Vachhani, 2012). This concerns interrogating ways in which the 'feminine' is deployed in organisations to designate 'the other of the same'. This necessitates a transformation in culture and a space/time that shifts away from self-sameness (a culture of sameness that replaces and substitutes phallogentrism rather than an alternative imaginary) to a culture of difference inscribed in language. 'It is necessary for a symbolism to be created among women in order for there to be love between them. This love is in any case only possible at the moment between women who can speak to each other. Without that interval of exchange, or of words, or of gestures, passions between women manifest themselves in a...rather cruel way' (Irigaray, 1993, cited in Whitford, 1991:43-44). In addition, these self-other relations are central to embodied love that is transformative of changing gendered relations in organisations. 'An ethics of sexual difference, that is, an ethics which recognizes the subjectivity of each sex, would have to address the symbolic division which allocates the material, corporeal, sensible, 'natural' to the feminine, and the spiritual, ideal, intelligible, transcendental to the masculine. A sensible transcendental is the condition of an ethics of sexual difference.' (Whitford, 1991: 149).

hooks - All About Love

In contrast with Irigaray and Kristeva, hooks' cultural critique provides a necessary practical and theoretical shift from the previous two writers. *All About Love* (hooks, 2000) is primarily concerned with an ethics of love – namely a return to love in the face of societal reticence and resistance to it. It is an examination of how love is sought but remains unexamined and how, by examining barriers to love, it is made possible. hooks (2000:87) is concerned with the ways in which 'awakening to love can happen only as we let go of our obsession with power and domination'. This teaches us what love is in the context of a societal conception (at least in western culture) of the meaningless of love

and its irrelevance in society. Most obviously, it is counter to 'bourgeois feminism' and enables a complex political and activist approach to social transformation that attends to the intersections between gender, race and class, arguably more so than the writers discussed thus far. Given the focus of this article on the activist potential of love and transforming organisations, hooks' approach to examining oppression and understanding productive change becomes all the more important.

hooks, by extending discourses of race, class, gender and nationality to everyday narratives, teaches us to share ideas that affect our daily lives and theorise from a place of positive engagement. In studies of gender and work, Nkomo (1992, 2011) makes great strides in re-imagining the writing of race and the post-colonial imagination (see also Cheng, 1997; Cox and Nkomo, 1990; Jack et al, 2011; Prasad, 2003). However, whilst these authors attend to the feminine by bringing together race and gender, little attention has been given to how post-colonial and feminist approaches can re-imagine spaces of writing, how such writing may develop and their political effects in organisations. hooks connects deeply with discourses of self-love and there are deep resonances and connections to an ethics of care (*cf.* Borgerson, 2001; Gilligan, 1982, 2011) although hooks is careful to point out that care and love are not synonymous. From this perspective, sharing knowledge and learning motivates social change and engenders responsibility, respect and trust. The book poses a practical approach to living a life of love. In this sense it develops a different 'feminine' writing to the dense theoretical texts of the other two writers, by engaging the personal in order to develop the political and unearth a practical ethic of love. For hooks (2000:7-8), genuine love is 'a combination of care, commitment, trust, knowledge, responsibility, and respect'.

Whilst hooks touches on the pain of love the overall thesis remains unashamedly and generously positive about nurturing a loving life. Central to this idea is its transformative potential and the importance of loving relationships in a quest for social justice, which hooks considers a love ethic. As hooks (2000:88) writes, 'commitment to a love ethic transforms our lives by offering us a different

set of values to live by. In large and small ways, we make choices based on a belief that honesty, openness, and personal integrity need to be expressed in public and private decisions'. Echoing previous work on critical pedagogy (hooks, 1994, 2010; cf. Cheng, 1997), hooks draws attention to love as part of our quest for social justice and that a defensiveness against love, of its naiveté, makes us cynical where love is written for the weak, the romantic, the sentimental. The taboo intimacies of love cover over the importance of a metaphysical meaning of love, not the desperation to receive love or the self-restoration of love. Care is thus a component of love but not love itself (hooks, 2000).

In *All About Love* the central vision is that of transformation and change. For hooks this is not rooted in utopian longing but rooted in an ethic which is *capable* of transformation where '...changing our thinking so that we see ourselves as being like the one who does change rather than among the among who refuse to change' (hooks, 2000:90). In *Outlaw Culture*, hooks (1994) is specifically concerned with the politics of representation especially resisting already established representations of gendered, racialized and classed marginalisation and disenfranchisement. By foreseeing avenues for intellectual and political engagement, hooks advocates an active, critical participation in movements for radical social change where love effects such change.

In *Talking Back*, hooks (1989:9) extols that 'moving from silence into speech is for the oppressed, the colonized, the exploited, and those who stand and struggle side by side a gesture of defiance that heals, that makes new life and new growth possible'. In this sense, love is deeply connected to belonging as well as liberation and marks a transformative movement from object of representation to subject. This sense of belonging is also a site of resistance and empowerment. What is central here is a love ethic centred on self-other relations that necessitate important and radical changes if love is to become a social and not a highly individualistic, marginal phenomenon (hooks, 2000:87). For hooks (ibid:57) 'The more we accept ourselves, the better prepared we are to take responsibility

in all areas of our lives....taking responsibility does not mean that we deny the reality of institutionalised injustice', we can choose how we respond to acts of (organisational) injustice. Cheng (1997) explores hooks in relation to organizational diversity research and demonstrates how academia uses methods to reinforce dominant groups. What hooks teaches us with regards to organisations is learning to perceive social and political contradictions by writing the disowned parts of love and interconnectedness with an emotional honesty (Cheng, 1997).

hooks (2000) briefly turns to work as a site for motivation and draws on her desire to work in an environment shaped by an ethic of love which has implications for developing socially just organisations (cf. Kostera, 2014). She notes the affectual resonance of walking into an office and sensing the mood of whether workers like what they do (ibid:63). 'Bringing love into the work environment can create the necessary transformation that can make any job we do, no matter how menial, a place where workers can express the best of themselves. When we work with love we renew the spirit; that renewal is an act of self-love, it nurtures our growth' (ibid: 65). In this sense, whilst working with a broader metaphysical concept of love, hooks reproduces problematic dilemmas of freedom, power and control associated with a 'do what you love' discourse. However, she counters this by highlighting how we feel troubled by the notion of self-love as though the very idea implies narcissism or selfishness and this manifests in work environments where employees are constantly required to undertake identity work to prove their worth and that we need to stop fearfully equating it with self-centredness: 'self-love is the foundation of our loving practice' (ibid:67).

I have thus far explored three key feminist writers that demonstrate the wisdom of love. Kristeva and Irigaray provide two distinct ways of dwelling with the presence of the feminine in textual practices. They use dense poetics and metonymic forms to effect strategies of change and interrogate phallogocentrism. In contrast, for hooks' passionate politics of writing (hooks, 1999),

love is central in the movement to create socially just cultural, temporal and psychical spaces. hooks' is perhaps the most overt treatise of the struggle to achieve an ethic of love practically through everyday life and its varied experiences. hooks is concerned with our silence about love: 'It is easier to articulate the pain of love's absence than to describe its presence and meaning in our lives (hooks, 2000:xxvi). In order to develop these arguments, I now turn more closely to what we can learn from these authors for our understanding of gender and work and the potential for understanding love as transformative and activist, that is to say mobilising of change and necessary in redefining organisations, structures, cultures and academic practice. More specifically, how are these politics realised and what are their effects?

Organising Love – Activism, Transformation and Potential

'Love is, in short, the soul's *sight* for invisible things' (Kristeva, 1987:110).

'As they become known to and accepted by us, our feelings and the honest exploration of them become sanctuaries and spawning grounds for the most radical and daring of ideas. They become a safe-house for that difference so necessary to change and the conceptualization of meaningful action' (Lorde, 1984/2007:37).

What then are the implications of feminine writing inspired by a love ethic? As Hopfl (2011:32) astutely asks, 'so what is possible to gather from all this? What this contributes to an understanding of gender issues in organizations is the capacity to make transparent the effects of the production of meaning, regulation through 'writing' and regulation of the 'other' within the logic of trajectory, strategy and purpose'. An important implication for gender, work and organisation is that love, through these writers, enables us to transform, redefine and politicise self-other relations and recast our own subjectivity in writing the subjectivity of others inspired by an awareness of the precariousness of self-other relations (or the consumption of the other) in organisations. For hooks,

this necessitates a love ethic in the pursuit of self-transformation (see also Sontag, 2012). For Kristeva, language is in crisis where meaning is dislocated and thus signals an impossibility of speaking love. For Irigaray, love is a way of realising a female imaginary, feminine subjectivity and love for/with the feminine. In this discussion I explore three dimensions of how these writers bring to bear practical politics and possibilities for political interruption – namely through three modes: reconstruction, reclamation and activation and I discuss the implications of these modes for work and organisation.

The first implication rests on how the feminine, and indeed femininity, are *constructed and reconstructed* through symbolic distribution in organisations, something that Irigaray explores in terms of her ethics of sexual difference and Kristeva highlights through the notion of textual capture. As Hopfl (2011:33) asserts, ‘Feminine attributes which are required in service of the organization are constructed within the phallogocentric discourse in order to serve its ends. Embodied practices are displaced by constructions that are mediated through mere representations of the feminine. For example, by valuing those aspects of the ‘feminine’ which serve the organization, organizations exclude women of flesh and blood from valorisation by the organization. The organization will only value the feminine to the extent that women become symbolic men, or indeed, as symbolic women: to behave “as women” (to recall Irigaray’s remark). They must submit to the imposition of the symbolic order and to the suppression of any deviation from it.’ What Hopfl highlights is that without recognising how the feminine is somehow always already co-opted and utilised in service of the organisation then we are not able to recognise the activist potential of thinking and writing out of a feminine space, or even to recognise our own oppression. This requires attention to the ways in which we are complicit in reproducing a patriarchal order. Irigaray, Kristeva and hooks help us to understand such oppression ‘that is beyond our conscious knowledge because we swim in it like fish in water’ (Fotaki et al, 2014:19). I am hopeful that these politics are effected by confronting the complexities of intimacies in organisations rather than diminishing or marginalising such experiences

(Bell and Sinclair, 2014) or reducing the erotic to coercion (Bologh, 1990). An ethics of love offers us alternative possibilities for intimacies, intensities and desires in organisations (Berlant, 2011, 2012; Kakabadse and Kakabadse, 2004; Mashek and Aron, 2004) and also raises the difficulty of intimacy. The connections between love and intimacy in organisations are, of course, complex however we need to problematize and question the assumptions of intimacy as a negation of the necessary space between self and other in organisations or through Irigaray, who stresses the importance of this spacing, the development of 'proximate distance'. As Toye (2010:48) explains, the spacing between self-other allows a place for two subjects to exist and 'This concept that foregrounds transformation stresses that these two subjects are not static, but are constantly engaging in processes of transformation and becoming, and that both entities on either side of the space have the right to this becoming'.

Secondly, a turn to love offers strategies for *reclaiming* a feminine/feminist space in organisations and taking up positions not reserved for gendered, racialized, classed and aged subjects, in order to invite new voices and imagine new organisational formations (Fotaki et al, 2014). As hooks emphasises, this sense of belonging is also a site of resistance and empowerment. Whilst I acknowledge the critiques of reclamation and in whose name this is done, writing is a political act and there are multiple effects of these politics (Grey and Sinclair, 2006; Phillips et al, 2013). It is the power of such writing that offers new ways of thinking and effecting change and of stirring researchers, policy makers or students. It disturbs the rational to break the seductive and intoxicating mastery of the text and surfaces the silent feminine. Whilst Hopfl (2011) notes the effects of such politics and that forms of women's writing are still ensnared within the trap of rhetoric, I am optimistic that subversion and transgression is possible without incorporation or correction. Men and women construct their work identities by translating and transmitting across boundaries of history, time and rational/emotional language in ways that engender movement, practical and political change.

The third implication for gender and work concerns *activation and activism*, namely activism and care working together at the intersection of what constitutes legitimate knowledge and forms the basis for a political interruption. This is most apparent in hooks' work where love is central to political engagement with its powerful relationship to desires, intimacies and mysteries (Mashek and Aron, 2004) alongside its destructive and positive potential. Bodies are active sites and change what and how we write (Hopfl, 2011). Feminine writing has often been charged with being arcane and theoretically impenetrable and, therefore, becomes enclaved within academic journals. I argue that it needs to be activated. It offers tools for activism and in order to activate possibilities for change, we need to disseminate this writing more widely in spaces and places beyond pay walls. These possibilities serve a purpose in terms of an intellectual activism and feminist politics (Naples, 1998) that also effect social change in organisations. Patricia Hill Collins (2013:146-47) writes how knowledge is a carrier of power: 'Academia is activist politics, where struggles over the meaning of ideas constitute the primary terrain of action....What we call something shapes how we use it, value it, legitimate it, and de-legitimate it. Calling anything "activist politics" is the kiss of death in academia, because it is often assumed that one cannot be "academic," in other words, appropriately objective, and "activist", which many academics see as synonymous with irrationality. It is a particular view of the academy that separates out mind, body, and passion; that separates out truth and knowledge from politics and ethics' (cf. Jaggar and Bordo, 1992). Such an activism practises 'irrationality' in organisations and employs love as an invitation of care to the other. As Hill Collins (2013:147) also notes, 'we need to do a better job of analyzing how academia masks or hides its own political behavior... but somehow we lack an effective language to talk about it'. Feminine writing of love is a way of interrogating these masks; of surfacing and activating the legitimation and de-legitimation of knowledge tethered to the corporatization of the university.

Concluding Remarks

My purpose in this article has been to firstly caution against narrow definitions of love that construct love as an ideology, condition or interior state that suggest a denial of politics or an aura of sentimentality or naiveté (Toye, 2010); secondly, to draw on feminine poetics that highlight the disruptive potential of love that build on debates in gender and work on sexual difference, writing and the feminine (Hopfl, 2011; Fotaki, 2014; Pullen, 2006; Bell and Sinclair, 2014); and finally, to highlight the ethical and political challenges and possibilities of feminine writing that are transformative and that have the potential for addressing political struggles in the study of organisations. On the one hand, we can see love as a force that brings people together, it cements a connection and exposes and defines responsibility. On the other, it unveils inherent contradiction, struggle and vulnerability or is morphed and mutated into blind, prohibited, demented or exploitative love. The wisdom of love disrupts, transforms and challenges existing, narrowly defined notions of love.

We need to examine how love is theorised and engage in its reconceptualisation to form new concepts of love that form the grounds for ethical and political relations with others (Toye, 2010). As Fotaki et al (2014:18) note, 'gender inequalities are embedded in the very language through which we speak'. This discussion raises significant potential for intersubjective and ambiguous love to be a disruptive ideal for the development of more caring and compassionate organisations (Kostera, 2014) where attention to the space between self-other is transformative of gender relations and enables a more multi-voiced diversity, as hooks helps to imagine (see also Jones et al, 2000).

By adopting an approach centred around love's transformative potential we are able to more fully understand the embodied interactions between individuals and groups in organisations and question what is designated as legitimate truth and knowledge. Giving the final word to Audre Lorde: 'As we learn to bear the intimacy of scrutiny and to flourish within it , as we learn to use the

products of that scrutiny for power within our living, those fears which rule our lives and form our silences begin to lose their control over us' (Lorde, [1984]2007:36). Only then will we begin to realise the potential of thinking, writing and acting with love.

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Endnotes

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